

Earlier this month President Bush released his final budget proposal. I was shocked to see how much he proposes slashing Medicare. This troubling budget plan put forth by the President takes this country in the wrong direction. As a Blue Dog Democrat I'm committed to keeping spending under control, however, cutting Medicare by \$556 billion over 10 years is not the answer. That type of approach is simply cutting people who are already hurting.

I know many of the Ohio Valley's residents are particularly concerned about Medicare as well. I recently sent out an email newsletter to people who signed up to receive my emails. (Anyone is welcome to sign up to receive my emails. Just go to [www.charliewilson.house.gov](http://www.charliewilson.house.gov) and click "subscribe.") I asked those subscribers which of the President's proposed cuts concerned them the most. It's not a scientific survey, and it may not be statistically significant but I think it provides an in-focus snapshot of how things look in Ohio's Sixth District. Of the several hundred who took the time to respond to my question, fully 46% said Medicare was the number one cut about which they worried.

Armed with such information and fueled by my own concerns over Medicare I recently sent a letter to the House Budget Committee Chairman John Spratt of North Carolina. As he develops the Fiscal Year 2009 budget I strongly urged him to reject the President's proposed cuts to our nation's Medicare system.

You need look no further than the Ohio Valley to see that as more Americans struggle to obtain affordable health care, it's critical to maintain our commitment to Medicare and to our seniors' health.

The Administration's proposal to drastically reduce the Medicare program is a non-starter. Many of the proposed devastating cuts would include freezing Medicare payments to our local hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, home health agencies, and other providers over the next three years.

The President's budget also calls for significant reductions to a number of crucial rural healthcare programs. If implemented, the proposed budget would eliminate rural health outreach grants, rural health flexibility grants, community access to emergency devices and threaten the benefits of thousands of Ohio Medicare beneficiaries.

Rural healthcare is in dire enough straits as it is. Our rural communities already face a difficult

time retaining doctors and buying new medical equipment. Now is not the time to reduce their funding. Rural doctors and patients deserve a better partner in the federal government.

In addition, the President's proposal would increase monthly premiums for millions of Medicare beneficiaries, totaling \$38 billion over the next 10 years. That'll hurt our ailing seniors right in the wallet.

My staff and I estimate that in Ohio, these cuts would endanger the health of nearly 1.8 million Medicare beneficiaries. That's approximately 15-percent of Ohio's current population. And let's face it, we're only getting older. At a time when the majority of our nation's Baby Boomers are just three years from receiving Medicare benefits, it is critical that we craft a budget that will ensure our Medicare program remains viable and sustainable for future generations. We must look out for our seniors and we must make it possible for our children and grandchildren to care for us as we get older.